

Keep Members Interested

It is easy to attract new members in times of crisis. Hot button issues energize the neighborhood, particularly if residents feel their property values or quality of life is threatened. However, after the publicity dies away and the problem is resolved, active members may disappear. It is considerably more difficult to sustain interest during mundane times.

Keeping the interest and involvement of association members is an ongoing challenge in every neighborhood. Here are some pointers and ideas that hopefully will stimulate your thinking.

Here are some helpful hints to maintaining interest:

- ***Be realistic in your expectations of the members.*** Many neighbors have other priorities that may limit participation.
- ***Stay focused on a few well-defined goals or projects.***
- ***Regularly check that meeting times, locations and meeting lengths are convenient for members.***
- ***Celebrate each success.***
- ***Ask individual neighbors for help or their involvement.*** Sometimes a personal invitation to help is most effective. A person may be willing if asked, but may not volunteer or speak up in a group setting.
- ***Find out what is important to your members*** and get them involved in committees or projects involving their interest.
- ***Make sure to welcome new neighbors.*** Establish a welcoming committee that visits or calls each new resident. The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center has welcome packets to help you.
- ***Organize regular social functions*** to encourage a sense of community.

Welcome Packets

Welcome packets for new County residents are available at the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center.

Consider distributing these packets as part of your ongoing new neighbor welcome efforts.

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- ***Sponsor clean-up days***, taking one street at a time so that the work seems manageable and can be accomplished in the morning.
- ***Create a telephone tree, listserv or other communication system.***
- ***Recognize volunteers*** by thanking each individual at a general meeting; acknowledging someone's efforts in your newsletter, or neighbors cooking dinner or cake/cookies for someone.
- ***Follow up*** on issues brought to the association for resolution.

Hold Social Events

One feature of more successful community associations is to offer a range of activities. They do so by staying in touch with neighbors' individual needs.

Not everyone is an activist. Some of your residents may be motivated by an opportunity to socialize. Your most successful event may be a 4th of July Picnic, Labor Day Parade, or Halloween Parade.

Consider combining social events with social responsibility by including food drives, or raffles that benefit local charities.

Other ideas for building community include organizing:

- ***A community yard sale,***
- ***Used book sale,***
- ***Yard beautification contest,*** or a
- ***Community association logo contest***

Undertake a Membership Drive.

Don't inadvertently restrict your numbers by having membership forms and sign up sheets only at meetings. In order to maximize your membership potential, be everywhere your neighbors are.

- ***Have volunteers go door to door.*** This can be a week-long effort or one-day blitz. Consider having a membership drive and then sponsoring a party that same day for volunteers to have fun and share experiences.
- ***Arm volunteers with printed materials.*** This can be a simple letter from the group's President that explains your neighborhood organization along with details of upcoming activities. Materials may also include information on municipal services and programs available in the area. Also, volunteers should carry membership forms with them and offer both immediate and mail-in membership opportunities.

Community Toolkit

- ***Develop a block leader network.*** Block leaders can pass out flyers and newsletters, welcome new residents, serve as a conduit for specific problems on the block, and place volunteers in activities. Work with organized Block Watches to promote safety within your community.
- ***Members can also be found at community gatherings.*** Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Remember to have information and membership sign-up sheets at your booth.

Communication

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Communicate

Reaching your audience will be a challenge for the entire organization. There are many ways to reach people. Here are some ideas for accomplishing this.

The Personal Touch

- ✓ Door-to-Door flyer distribution
- ✓ Person-to-Person phone calls
- ✓ Recognition of member achievements

Community Events

- ✓ Neighborhood surveys
- ✓ Booth at local events
- ✓ Coffees or other social events
- ✓ Join efforts with adjoining neighborhoods
- ✓ Send speakers to business groups, service clubs, schools or churches

Read All About it!

- ✓ Community Newsletter – for examples, see www.randolphcivic.org/echo.html, www.scribd.com/doc/6057778/EBCA-NewsletterSept08 and www.maplewoodcitizens.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/mapleleaf_sept08_4pg_1.pdf
- ✓ Ads in school, religious congregation, and club newsletters
- ✓ Bulletins, notices, pamphlets and posters

Going Online!

Create an organization email address:
mail.live.com, gmail.google.com

Reserve a domain name:
www.godaddy.com

Consider a blog: www.blogger.com,
spaces.live.com

Social networking site: twitter.com

Create a website — Examples:

www.randolphcivic.org

www.luxmanor.org

www.ebca.org

www.maplewoodcitizens.org

Rules and Regulations

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Establish Rules

The fundamental purposes of community associations are to provide a basis for protecting members' equity in the community and a framework within which people can make decisions.

Specific purposes of rules and regulations include:

- Enforcing the community's bylaws and policies in a fair and diplomatic way;
- Protecting, enhancing and promoting the purposes of the association as stated in the legal documents;
- Restricting and governing the use of the common areas and amenities;
- Establishing architectural guidelines and controls for aesthetic value;
- Establishing rules for the use of facilities by owners, guests and tenants;
- Amplifying, expanding, clarifying and interpreting the broad restrictions in the association's governing documents;
- Protecting and preserving the property and assets of the association and the owners.

Draft By-laws

The following are "bare-bones" bylaws to help you get started. Each community will undoubtedly have its own approach.

Article I – Name

The parties involved shall choose the name of the organization.

Article II – Purpose

The purpose of this organization is to achieve and maintain decent and wholesome living conditions in Montgomery County, Maryland; assist persons living in the specific neighborhood to work together for the good of their neighborhood; and provide a non-partisan organization which will benefit this neighborhood and this County through worthwhile programs.

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Article III – Membership

Section 1. Membership in this organization shall be open only to persons who reside or own property in the neighborhood boundaries.

Section 2. The neighborhood boundaries are the interior of the streets that border the neighborhood.

Section 3. The organization may enroll honorary members, but these members may not vote on matters before this organization.

Article IV – Annual Meetings

During the first meeting of the calendar year, a meeting of this organization shall be convened for the purpose of electing officers. This meeting shall also be a regular meeting of the organization for other business.

Article V – Officers

Section 1. The officers of the neighborhood organization shall consist of President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary.

Section 2. The officers shall be elected at the first annual meeting from a slate prepared by the Nominating Committee, as well as from any additional nominations from the floor. The persons receiving the highest number of votes for each office shall be elected. Those elected shall serve until the next election.

Section 3. No officer shall serve more than three (3) consecutive terms in the same office. A term is one year.

Section 4. In case of a vacancy in office other than that of President, the vacancy shall be filled by election at a subsequent regular meeting of the organization.

Section 5. Officers may be removed for cause, including violation of the by-laws or dereliction of duty, by a majority of two-thirds of the votes at a regular meeting of the organization, provided that the officer to be removed has been notified in writing of the proposed removal at least thirty (30) days before the meeting.

Article VI – Duties of Officers

Section 1. The President is the chief executive officer of the organization. The duties of the President shall be to preside over all meetings of the organization, to call special meetings, to appoint committee chairpersons and to be or appoint the spokesperson for the organization to local government, the press, or other community associations.

Section 2. The duties of the Vice President shall be to serve as chief executive officer and preside over all meetings in the absence of the President, coordinate committee chairpersons and report status to the board and to succeed to the office of President in the event of a vacancy in that position.

Community Toolkit

Section 3. The duties of the Treasurer shall be to keep accounts of all expenses, collect membership dues, and to make regular reports of the organization's financial status.

Section 4. The duties of the Secretary shall be to maintain the records of the organization, keep accurate minutes for all meetings, receive and handle all correspondence addressed to the organization.

Article VII – Meetings

Section 1. The regular meeting of the organization shall be held monthly. The time and place are to be designated by the President.

Section 2. Special meetings may be called by the President or by petition of ten (10) or more members. Such meetings may act on any business proper to the organization, provided that written notice of the meeting has gone out to all members at least ten (10) days before the meeting date.

Article VIII – Committees and Programs

Section 1. Committees and programs of this organization shall be established by majority vote of members present at a meeting of the organization.

Section 2. Committee members and chairpersons shall be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the President.

Article IX – Procedure

Unless the meeting has adopted some other procedure, all meetings of this organization are governed by guidelines of [Roberts Rules of Order](#).

Article X – Amendments

The by-laws of this organization may be amended at any meeting, provided that the proposed amendments have been sent to all members prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered.

After ratification by membership, by-laws are signed by the association president, vice president, and secretary.

Budgets

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Set Fees

Community associations often charge fees to their membership. Depending on the association, the assessments may be paid monthly, quarterly, or annually. Keep in mind that fees can be a barrier to participation for some when determining fee amount.

At a minimum, fees should cover such costs as:

- Printing materials
- Website hosting
- Food and drinks for meetings
- Room rentals
- Insurance

Some associations offer expanded services to their communities. These fees may be optional to those who opt to receive them. Expanded services can include:

- Landscape and maintenance of common areas
- Social Activities
- Security patrols
- Fees for amenities (pool, tennis court, golf course, exercise room, etc...)

Tips for the Treasurer

Open an account with a local bank.

Hire an accountant to audit finances annually.

Require a second signature to act as a security measure and prevent fraud.

Determine fees/dues, based on actual needs.

Report on the Budget

An annual budget report is usually approved at the annual meeting of the association and clearly identifies itemized expenses and income for the prior year.

Many associations distribute the annual budget of the association and make it available through the Treasurer of the association, as required by the by-laws.

Raise Funds

Steps to Success

1. Set a fundraising goal.
2. Watch for hidden costs.
3. Give yourself and your group time to prepare.
4. Set up specific timeframes and stick to them.
5. Conduct fewer and more effective programs.
6. Stay motivated throughout the program by focusing on your goal.
7. Communicate clearly with all parties involved in the fundraiser before, during and after the program.
8. Recruit volunteers ahead of time.
9. Have fun!

File for 501(c)4 Tax-Exempt Status

A community association should consider tax-exempt status by filing for 501(c)4 status with the IRS. To be eligible, a civic organizations must be operated exclusively for the promotion of social welfare and not organized for profit.

Unlike 501(c)3 status, which is talked about next, an 501(c)4 organization may be politically active. Also, contributions to a 501(c)4 are not deductible.

The following are excellent online resources for learning more about 501(c)4 status:

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/nonprofits/article/0,,id=96178,00.html>

http://nonprofitmanagement.suite101.com/article.cfm/what_is_a_501c4_organization

Consider 501(c)3 Tax-Exempt Status

A key reason communities choose to establish a 501(c)3 is to create a foundation for raising money for a community improvement project or charitable activity such as:

- Purchasing recreation center improvements/equipment

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- Funding an aging-in-place initiative
- Establishing a local school foundation

Local bar associations may be able to direct associations to "pro bono" or reduced-cost legal services from lawyers experienced in the non-profit sector. In Montgomery County, contact the Maryland Bar Foundation Pro Bono Program at 301-424-7651, if you are looking for assistance. Their address is: 27 West Jefferson Street, Rockville, MD 20850

Online resources for 501(c)3 requirements and forms may be found at:

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/charitable/article/0,,id=96099,00.html>

Meetings 10

Conduct Regular Meetings

It is up to you to determine whether it makes sense to hold meetings annual, quarterly or monthly. Your community's goals should help in this determination. Regular and predictable meetings will help your association and membership stay involved and focused on the organization's goals.

Conduct Successful Meetings

Your conduct of association meetings matters. Efficient and organized meetings will help attract participants and keep them engaged.

The following is a checklist to foster a positive meeting.

- ***Select a neutral place to meet***, such as a school or library meeting room, B-CC Regional Service Center, or a local restaurant.
- ***Prepare and post an agenda***
- ***Clearly state the purpose of your meeting on the agenda***
- ***Start and end on time***
- ***Keep the meeting moving and watch the general flow***
- ***Encourage participation***
- ***Summarize the conversation frequently***
- ***Stress cooperation, not conflict***
- ***Summarize decisions reached***
- ***Point out differences not yet resolved***

Tips

Robert's Rules provides for constructive and democratic meetings, to help, not hinder, the business of the Board.

Under no circumstances should "undue strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation.

For more information about Roberts Rules online, visit: www.robertsrules.org.

"Roberts Rules has been a great way to keep our meetings on track while allowing everyone a chance to state their opinions."

~ Ilaya Rome-Hopkins, East Bethesda

- ***State ideas positively and show their relation to the overall issue***
- ***Use consistent rules – such as Roberts Rules of Order – to add structure to deliberations***
- ***Outline future actions and get commitments for follow through***
- ***Set the next meeting date, time and place.***

When you find yourself chairing or facilitating a community meeting, the ability to express yourself in a clear and concise manner is important. Listening, however, can be even more important.

Both speaking and listening are skills that everyone involved in the group should master, especially those in leadership positions.

Speak Effectively

The most respected members of a group are often the best speakers. They are able to get an idea across to a group of people without dominating the meeting or rambling.

Here are tips to help improve your speaking ability:

- ***Know what you want to say.*** Outline your main points on a piece of paper before you speak. Use the outline as a guide to help you be more focused.
- ***Keep it short and to the point.***
- ***Speak clearly and project your voice outward.***
- ***Practice your speech.*** Try practicing your presentation in front of your mirror at home.
- ***Be Concise.*** Focus on one or two central ideas in your speech.
- ***Make eye contact with the audience.***
- ***Avoid distractions.*** Avoid words like “um,” “ah,” “kinda” and “you know”. Also avoid playing with your hair or glasses or jingling your keys.

Listen to Others

A successful community leader works at listening to other individual's concerns. They focus on not just the words being spoken, but what those words mean.

This skill takes practice and hard work. The guidelines below may help you to improve your listening skills:

- ***Listen for the unfamiliar.***

- ***Rephrase important points in your own words.*** This will allow the speaker to clarify the statement if there has been a misunderstanding.
- ***Pay attention to details.*** Details are important in communication, especially if the membership differs significantly on the issue.
- ***Be open minded about new ideas and opinions.***
- ***Allow speakers to complete their ideas or opinions without interruption.***
- ***If you are not clear on terms being used, ask the speaker to define them.***

Practice Active Listening

Active listening is making a conscious effort to hear, analyze, assign meaning to and respond to what another person is saying. Successful active listening can be exhausting, but will help build confidence that you care about what's important to your members.

Steps to becoming an effective active listener include:

- ***Focus on the Speaker.*** Establish—and keep—eye and face contact with the speaker. Reinforce what is being said is being heard through non-verbal facial expressions. To paraphrase an old saying, good listeners are like poor boxers: they lead with their faces.
- ***Use Receptive Language.*** Follow and encourage the speaker's train of thought by using receptive language; e.g., "I see," "Hmmm," "Un huh," etc.
- ***Listen for Key Words.*** It takes continuous action to focus on the essence of the information being shared. The listener's mind should be actively gathering, sorting, sifting, evaluating, synthesizing, and ordering the data.
- ***Respond.*** Verify with the speaker about the essence of what was said, especially if the thought is being captured on a flipchart or electronically for future reference. Ask questions for clarity but be cautious that the questions are not leading. Never, unless expressly requested, give an opinion on the presented information.

Consensus 11

Build Consensus

The goal of consensus building is to get individuals who hold different views on an issue to share information and negotiate to arrive at a mutually acceptable course of action. Consensus is not always possible in every situation but is a desirable goal, particularly in communities. A majority vote does not represent a consensus.

Begin building consensus by asking each individual for their opinion. For consensus to work, each should be willing to accept less than everything they want in order to help the association toward its goal.

Keep in mind the following tips to help your community reach consensus:

- ***Rank problems and/or solutions.***
- ***Brainstorm*** to help generate ideas in a short period of time.
- ***Encourage interaction*** in meetings, which may result in a consensus.
- ***Use negotiation techniques.***
- ***Create a focus group.*** Members of this group will help describe the problem or define others' perception.

The National Parks Service has an excellent resource for consensus building available on their website. You can find some of the following information and other useful tools at:
www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoobox/index_comtoolbox.htm.

Use Brainstorming Tools

- ***Basic Technique:*** Break into small groups (15 people or less). Arrange chairs in a circle to allow everyone to see each other. Set aside a specific amount of time.

Describe questions that the group will respond to and check for understanding. Request that individuals not discuss the merits of each idea until all ideas have been recorded.

Write down all ideas on a flip chart. Print large, legibly and fast. Repeat back key words and phrases and be sure to ask the speaker to clarify ideas you do not understand. Build on and expand ideas. Push the group to consider other ways of looking at the issue in order to stimulate more ideas.

Community Toolkit

- **Silent Thinking and Writing:** Present a question or statement and ask individuals to spend 5 to 15 minutes reflecting, and then writing down their responses. Responses can either be handed in and a facilitator reads them to the group. Consider asking each individual to share if there are individuals who seem quiet or reluctant to speak.
- **Round Robin:** Ask each individual in turn to share one idea at a time until either there are no more ideas or the time limit is reached. Try reversing the direction of calling on people.
- **Popcorn:** Ideas are called out randomly and quickly.
- **Discussion Brainstorm:** Have a discussion about the question or issue for a specific amount of time, say 5 to 10 minutes. Then run the brainstorm, describing key ideas that came up.
- **Sticky Notes:** Each individual is given 5 minutes to think about a response to the question or issue. As an alternative pair individuals up to generate ideas. Individuals or pairs are asked to record their responses on as many sticky notes as necessary. The stick notes are then given to the facilitator who reads them and sticks them on the wall or a flip chart. Similar ideas are then grouped.
- **Reverse Brainstorming:** The first half of this technique is identical to Basic Technique. Once that exercise is over, re-state the question as its total opposite as a “worst case” question. Begin brainstorming again using the mirror image question. This time, after the answers are recorded, the facilitator “flips” each answer to its opposite. The answers from both exercises are then combined.

Conflict 12

Manage Conflict

Conflict can be daunting for a community association to address. Conflicts between neighbors can be particularly uncomfortable. Some community associations make it a point to avoid issues that split the community and pit neighbor against neighbor.

It is important that any conflict is addressed immediately to prevent damage to personal relationships. Disagreements among association members can be an opportunity for growth, change and new understanding.

Many disagreements can be resolved with mediation. A few suggestions to help manage conflict include:

- ***Talk directly to one another, face to face.*** Direct conversation is more effective than sending a letter or complaining to someone else.
- ***Choose the right time and place to talk.*** Find a neutral place where you can both talk undisturbed for as long as it takes. Approach the other person and ask if you can set up a convenient time to talk.
- ***Don't blame or call names.*** If you make the other person angry, they are less likely to be calm with you.
- ***Listen to the other person.*** Give them a chance to tell their side of the story completely. Although you may not agree with what is being said, show that you are listening by saying you hear what they are saying and that you are glad you are discussing the problem together.
- ***Negotiate a solution.*** Ask "What can we do to improve the situation for both of us?" or "What can we do to resolve our differences?"
- ***Check back with each other.*** Ask the other person "Is this working for you?"

Need Help Resolving Conflict?

Consider contacting:

Bethesda-Chevy Chase Regional Services Center, 240-777-8200

Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County, 301-942-7700

Getting to Know Your Community

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Know Your Neighborhood

An important part of running a community association is knowing it. Consider maintaining an archive or historian for the association. Your community newsletter or website are good places for publishing interesting facts for neighbors.

The B-CC Regional Services Center can help you locate information about your community. Other resources include:

- **Board of Elections** – (voting districts, elected officials)
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/elections
- **GIS Maps** - www.montgomerycountymd.gov/gis
- **Master Plans** - www.mc-mncppc.org/community/plan_areas/master_plans.shtm
- **Parks** - www.mcparkandplanning.org/parks/facilities/find_a_park.shtm

Take a Survey

Use a survey to identify neighborhood issues and allow for feedback for your association meetings. Following are the two most common methods of conducting a written Neighborhood Survey. Method I takes more time initially from the survey takers, but it is more thorough and will return more reliable results. Method II relies on the neighbors to take the initiative to fill out the forms and to not procrastinate. While it is not necessary (and in reality, almost impossible) to retrieve a form from each resident in a neighborhood, your efforts will be most effective the more input you receive from residents.

Method I

1. Gather 2-4 neighbors together and distribute pencils, survey and clipboards.
2. Assign each person to a particular section of the neighborhood. You may not be able to cover the entire neighborhood in one day—Saturday or Sunday afternoons are best. You may want to spread your effort over a few weeks.
3. Survey takers should knock on every door, introduce themselves, explain why they are there, ask the resident to complete the survey, then note the address on the form and go to the next door.

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4. Keep a list of addresses where no one was home or the people did not have the time to complete the survey and return the next day or week.

Method II

1. Gather 2-4 neighbors together to distribute survey sheets to homes in the community. The survey sheets will indicate when the survey takers will return to collect.
2. Assign each person to a particular section of the neighborhood. You may not be able to cover the entire neighborhood in one day—Saturday or Sunday afternoons are best. You may want to spread your effort over a few weeks.
3. Survey takers should return on the date indicated to retrieve the surveys. (They will find that most doors do not have the sheets reattached to the doors, so they will need to knock on each door and probably return a second or third time to retrieve the forms).

Online Surveys

You may also consider an Internet survey. Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>) is an excellent recourse to design and deliver an on-line survey.

Acknowledgments

"An Introduction to Community Association Living", Center for Community Association Volunteers

"Neighborhood Association Toolkit", City of Henderson, NV, Neighborhood Services

"Neighborhood Organizing Toolkit", City of Riverside, CA, Office of Neighborhoods

"Neighborhood Organization Toolkit", City of Cedar Hill, TX

"Robert's Rules of Order - Summary Version", © 1997 Beverly Kennedy
www.robertsrules.org

"Community Tool Box", National Park Service, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. (www.nps.gov/phso/rtcatoolbox/index_comtoolbox.htm).

